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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for ways in which parents can help their children learn to read English are contained in this short booklet. Activities to be performed in the home, such as listening to and talking to the child in any language, reading aloud, reading for oneself, obtaining books for the home, and organizing study time for the child, are discussed. Community activities for parents, such as adult classes, museum trips, and school volunteer participation, are encouraged. A list of sources for reading materials and magazine articles on the problems of bilingualism is included. (MKM)

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How can I help my child learn to read English as a second language?

If your child speaks one language in school and another language at home, he meets two cultures every day. At school his teachers want him to speak English. They may even punish him for speaking a different language. Sometimes the students make fun of his accent. On the way to and from school, his neighborhood friends want him to use their language, and, at home, you may make the same demand.

This is a difficult life for a child. He has to learn how to behave in each culture, what to say, and in which language to say it.

On the one hand, if he chooses to belong only to your world, he will have a hard time in school. The books the school uses and the tests it gives are related to its values. If he does not know what the school expects from him, he will neither understand the

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by Marcia Baghban

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You can help your child to be proud of himself and to want to learn

books nor do well on the tests. Leaving school can affect the rest of his life and his chances to do what he wants to do.

On the other hand, if he chooses to belong only to the school world, he will try to forget his background. He may not pay attention to what you say. He may not want to tell where you live or talk about how you live, and he will not have friends from your group. But inside himself he will feel that he is a bad person because he deserted his family and his history. This is not psychologically healthy for him.

Your child is being pulled in two directions. You are pulling him one way while his school is pulling him another way. He is between two worlds, and yet he must somehow decide, "Who am I?" Your serious attention and cooperation can help him form the answer to this question.

His self-concept

Self-concept means how a person sees himself. It is how he thinks he is and how he thinks he should be. He receives his self-concept from family, friends, and school. He discovers their attitudes toward him by what they say and how they treat him. In time, he builds his self-concept and shapes his behavior.

Some bilingual children have weak self-concepts. This means that they do not think highly of themselves. Because they are not permitted to use their home language in school, they feel that there must be something wrong with it. When they are embarassed by their language, they become sensitive about their background. Eventually, they feel that something is wrong with them, and this makes their self-concept negative.

You can help make sure that your child's self-concept is positive by not forcing him to choose either your

world or the school's world. If you deny English, you deny the language of most people in America. If you deny your native language, you deny a culture that can contribute to its own growth and to America. When you are proud of what you are and respect your heritage, your child will too. If your child is proud of what he is and loyal to his family, he can learn to succeed in school.

Help him want to learn

It is difficult for anyone to learn something he doesn't want to learn or sees no reason to learn. First of all, your child needs to be willing to learn, and second, he needs to be willing to learn English.

In many instances in America, there is a relation between the education someone has and the kind of job he holds. English and a diploma can give your child the kind of job he wants rather than any kind he can get. In addition, his salary may be higher for doing the job he wants.

Knowing two languages can increase his job opportunities. There are large bilingual groups in America: Indians, Mexican-Americans, Spanish-Americans in the Southwest; Cubans in Florida; French-speakers in New England; Scandanavians in the northern middle states; and Puerto Ricans, Chinese, Japanese, and

During meals is one good time to talk to your children and to learn what they have to say. Encourage them to talk to you.

newly arrived immigrants from most countries of the world in the large cities. Some of these groups are so large that elementary schools have started to teach the first three grades in their language. High schools may already teach these languages to students who speak only English. If your child learns to speak both English and his native language, he could become a teacher or principal representing your group. Knowing these two languages will make him a better teacher or principal. Not only can he talk to his students and understand their difficulties, but he can also work with teachers and administrators from different groups.

Besides education, there are other areas that need people who know more than one language. Factories require bilingual labor relations managers and interpreters. Businesses need to reach your group through advertising. They want representatives to start stores in local neighborhoods. Newspapers and magazines are published in different languages. They ask for people to write articles and sell issues to homes where families might be interested. Every day more and more organizations feel the need for employees who know two, or even three, languages well. The man or woman who has the languages and the education will be ready to receive an interesting, useful position.

Furthermore, when someone learns another language, he learns about another culture. This makes people know each other better. If your child is able to talk to many kinds of people, he will accept different people more readily, and others will understand him more easily.

For these reasons, you can decide that education is important and that school is good because it is the place to receive an education. Then because of how you feel, your child may be persuaded that he needs to finish school and that in order to finish school, he needs to learn English while he maintains his first language and culture.

Some ways you can help

Now that we have looked at your child's situation, his feelings about himself, and his desire to learn, let's consider how to develop his language skills in order to help him learn to read.

There are many ways to help build your child's language skills

1) **Get him a health checkup.** It is impossible for a child to work if there is something wrong with how he feels. Many schools or local clinics provide eye and ear examinations. Since a child's eyes and ears are used most at school, nothing should be wrong with them. Enough sleep and breakfast are also necessary.

2) **Let him talk.** He may like to talk when he first comes home from school, during meals, just before bedtime, or while doing something with you such as washing dishes or fixing the car. Any time you ask his opinion, answer his question, or listen to him, you help his self-concept because you show him that you care about him and what he thinks. This also increases his vocabulary, his listening ability, and his skill in following a conversation.

3) **Talk to him.** To children of all ages, listening to speech is very important. At every stage of

language development, an adult is a model and a teacher.

You can add to your child's vocabulary by using names for the objects in your conversation rather than *it*, *that*, or *the thing*. Also, if you answer his question with a long answer instead of a simple *yes* or *no*, you help him develop sentences. Try to notice the similarities and differences in shapes, colors, and sizes of objects and point them out to him. In this way, he will learn to look for details in his surroundings. Since language learning and reading involve recognizing and remembering many details, this is an important skill to acquire.

If your English is not very good, use your native language. Whatever a child understands in one language, he will transfer to the second. In fact, if he knows one language well, he will learn another well.

Thus, what your child can read and write is related to what he can say or has heard. If he talks (Number 2) and listens to you talk (Number 3) a great deal, he will be able to read and write a great deal.

4) **Read to him.** Read stories or have aunts, uncles, grandparents, brothers, and sisters read stories to him in either language. Even if a child is too young to read himself, he can understand when you speak and can recognize the pictures. It is a good idea to have different kinds of books at home and to let your child choose the story he wants to read. He may want the same story again and again. So that listening and reading are fun for him, he should hear what he likes. And if you stop reading when he is tired or wants to play, he will continue to like listening to stories.

   In addition to hearing stories at home, he may be interested in the children's story hours at your local library. The librarian from the children's section of the library reads stories to younger children on certain days of the week. By calling or visiting the library, you should be able to learn which days these are.

   Listening to someone read does not need to stop because a child gets older or can read for himself.

Hearing a story is even fun for adults. You might have family evenings for reading stories. Everyone's reading may improve by what he hears. The more anyone hears, the better he will read.

5) **Read yourself.** Your child knows your feelings, and they influence him. If you read and he sees you reading, you will be his model. Even if you read only the newspaper every day, he will understand how reading becomes a habit, and he will copy you.

6) **Have books at home.** There are children's books in different languages. There are many written in English for groups who speak different languages. Some places to find such books are listed at the end of this paper in Part 2 of the bibliography.

   If you can't afford to buy many books, or if your child reads too fast to buy very many, the library in your town will give him a free library card. With this card, he can take books home from the children's room and return them by the date stamped at the back of each book. For your older son or daughter, there are Young People, Young Adult, and Adolescent sections at the library. The high school they attend should have a library too.

   However, your child doesn't have to know how to read to use books. The public library has books for children who are too young to read.

And, you can make toys and games to help your child get ready for reading. The Matterson book listed in Part 2 of the bibliography gives many examples of easy-to-make toys for children. You can also find ideas for making toys just by looking at those in stores. But whether you make or buy toys and games, it is important to choose those that use words, numbers, shapes, colors, sounds, and textures. These will be most useful in language learning and reading.

7) **Encourage pets and hobbies.** If your child likes dogs or stamps, he will often start to read to learn more about them. He may meet people who share the same interests. Often these people join a club which has activities in one area of interest, such as photography, drawing, or sports. The YWCA, YMCA, Boys' Club, Girls' Club, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and his own school are some of the places where he may find a group he likes. These contacts with books and people who speak English will improve his reading and his English.

He can also rent or borrow musical instruments. Lessons may involve singing in English and speaking English with the teacher. The lessons are sometimes given in exchange for work around the school or at the music teacher's house.

Making a bookcase or a model airplane, cooking or sewing, and fixing cars all can involve reading. Just learn your child's interests and help him start.

8) **Organize home tasks.** Try to arrange your child's duties at home so that he has some time to study. Washing dishes, buying food, or watching younger brothers and sisters are better early in the day. There should be a time at night when he can read or do homework in a quiet place.

9) **Improve your own English.** Your local high school, YWCA-YMCA, hospitals, and Red Cross offer evening classes. You can learn English, swimming, tennis, driving a car, nursing, child care, first aid, sewing, woodworking, art, or mathematics. Any activity you enjoy will cause you to read more in your area of interest and let you meet people who speak English.

You can read magazines and books at the library and, in larger libraries, listen to records and see films there. The main desk of the public library will give you a free library card, and you will be able to take books and records home.

If you want to read more about bilingualism, there is a list of articles written in English in Part 1 of the bibliography at the end of this paper. In Part 2, the Ford-Nicholson entry refers you to

materials on other subjects which will help both your English and your reading skills.

10) **See what is in your neighborhood.** Besides libraries, museums are useful places, and they are fun to walk through. They have many signs that give practice reading English. Some museums

have a children's museum which gives classes for elementary and sometimes high school students. Try to visit the museum with your child and find out from the Information Desk what it offers.

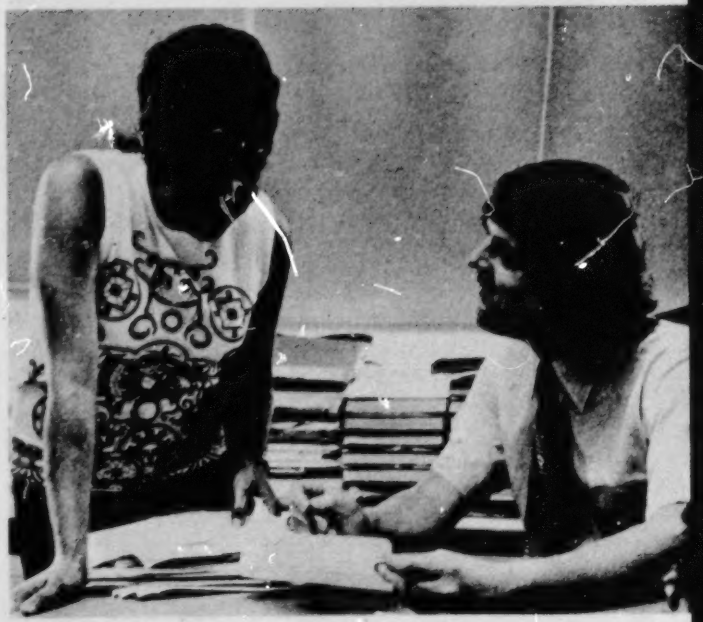
Taking walks with your child and reading the signs along the road will also improve his English. Watching the animals, clouds, or building construction that you see as you walk will teach him to look for details. Going shopping or to the movies, eating in a restaurant, visiting a zoo or the places tourists go increase his vocabulary, observations, and experiences. Radio and television give much language practice, but you must be careful that your child does not spend too much time with them.

11) **Find out what the school offers.** In addition to Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings where you may go, some schools have classes about what parents can do at home to help their child. There are also conferences so that parents and teachers can get to know each other as well as discuss problems. Often schools have open-

house evenings for parents. There may be special reading classes or tutors for your child at his school. You might enroll him in a reading class or find a tutor for him.

Bilingual parents sometimes work in the schools. You can be a teacher assistant, interpreter, tutor, receptionist, or helper on a field trip. This makes children who speak a language other than English at home feel more comfortable in school, and they will talk more and learn more. You may want to see about doing something at your school.

12) **Support your school.** If your area does not offer these ways for you to assist at school, talk to other parents and the school principal about starting projects. Schools should be interested, because teachers have found that bilingual children learn well when the home language is part of the classroom. You can make a bridge between the school and home. It is not fair to your child to leave him in either world. Help him cross from one to the other freely and comfortably as he needs.



Here are some books and magazines with helpful information

If you are interested in reading more, this list will give you ideas about where to look.

Part 1 includes articles on the problems of bilingualism, bilingual programs, and parents. You can find recent journals in the magazine room of the library. Journals before this year are grouped by year and placed on the shelves with the nonfiction books.

Part 2 presents books and addresses which provide book titles, newspapers, magazines, and learning-related materials for speakers of different languages at various age and reading levels. You or your library may write the address listed for ordering instructions or price lists.

Part 1: More to Read on Parents and Bilingualism

Allen, Virginia F. "Understanding the Cultural Context" *Modern Language Journal*, 53, 5 (May 1969) 324-26.

Shows how the same words have different meanings in different cultures and different meanings in the same culture. Gives 10 practical steps for understanding another culture.

Bain, Winifred E. "Mother Tongue or Other Tongue?" *Parents Magazine*, 17 (n.m. 1942) 26, 27, 40.

Offers a rather old article on children who speak other languages at home and the difficulties they face. Interests us now because the situation involves many of the same problems.

Chavez, Simon J. "Preserve Their Language Heritage," *Childhood Education*, 33, 4 (December 1956) 165, 185.

Says that teaching Spanish in elementary school gives less anxiety to the child who is a native Spanish-speaker and more understanding of the difficulties in learning another language to the non-Spanish speaker.

Conklin, Paul. "Good Day at Rough Rock," *American Education*, 3, 2 (February 1967) 4-9.

Describes the Rough Rock Demonstration School in which Navajos teach and participate as a community in school and dormitory life.

Davis, S. Elizabeth. "Parents and School Should Share," *The Reading Teacher*, 23, 8 (May 1970) 707-10.

Deals with some of the pressures which any child meets in beginning school and suggests ways parents can help their child.

Hakes, David T. "Psychological Aspects of Bilingualism," *Modern Language Journal*, 49, 4 (April 1965) 220-27.

Reviews how a child growing up learns vocabulary and grammar in any language. Includes the function of his parents at each stage and the problems that arise from his meeting two languages at the same time.

Harmer, William R. "To What Extent Should Parents Be Involved in Language Programs for Linguistically Different Learners," *Elementary English*, 47, 7 (November 1970) 940-43.

Examines the role of the parent in his child's language development and talks about the ways parents can help his school.

Levey, Sylvia. "The New Hot Potato," *Reading Newsreport*, 5, 2 (November-December 1970) 33-35, 49.

Describes a new master's degree program for teachers in which bilingual adults learn how to teach the standard school subjects to bilingual children.

Long, Richard F. "Navajo Schools: Indians Teaching Indians," *Opportunity* (May 1971) 3-7.

Identifies the situation of the bilingual learner in Navajo communities and three schools started to involve Navajos in teaching their own children.

Murphy, Betty. "Boston's Chinese: They Have Problems Too!" *Opportunity* (May 1971) 18-24.

Considers the problems facing every age Chinese within the Boston Chinese community. Includes differences in age, education, attitudes, home area in China, and lack of bilingual schools and facilities.

Ortego, Philip D. "Schools for Mexican-Americans: Between Two Cultures," *Saturday Review* (April 17, 1971) 62-64, 80-81.

Outlines the situation of Mexican-Americans and calls for bilingual-bicultural education involving the whole community.

Robertson, Dorothy Reed. "Parents and Teachers: Partners in the Teaching of Reading," *The Reading Teacher*, 23, 8 (May 1970) 722-26.

Discusses how all parents can help their child before he begins school and then how they can help him once he has started school.

Totten, George. "Bringing Up Children Bilingually," *The American Scandinavian Review*, 48, 1 (Spring 1960) 42-46.

Tells about the experiences of a second generation American couple who decided to have their children grow up speaking both English and Swedish.

Wartenberg, Arlene. "A Parent-Teacher Speaks," *The Reading Teacher*, 23, 8 (May 1970) 748-50, 765.

Includes six ways that all parents can help their children in reading by making a home reading environment.

Part 2: Sources for Reading Materials

Crosby, Muriel, Editor. *Reading Ladders for Human Understanding.* American Council on Education, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036.

Offers more than 1,000 books on six human relations themes grouped by primary, intermediate, junior, senior, and mature readers.

Dobler, Lavinia. *Dobler World Directory of Youth Periodicals.* Schulte Publishing Company, 80 Fourth Avenue, New York, New York 10002.

Contains a listing of magazines published in foreign languages and in English throughout the world.

Ford, David and Nicholson, Eunice. *Adult Basic Reading Instruction in the United States.* International Reading Association, 6 Tyre Avenue, Newark, Delaware 19711.

Lists programs and materials for adult literacy. Contains a useful section for non-English speaking adults.

Keating, Charlotte Matthew. *Building Bridges of Understanding.* Palo Verde Publishing Company, Box 5783, Tucson, Arizona 85705.

Describes books for preschool through high school children. Includes material about American Indians, Spanish-speakers, Chinese-Americans, and Japanese-Americans.

Matterson, E. M. *Play and Plaything for the Preschool Child.* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Incorporated, 1967).

Gives ideas and directions for many simple, helpful objects you can make or assemble at home for your young child.

Package Library of Foreign Children's Books. Department T, 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10003.

Sends a catalog containing language packages to order for children's books in Spanish, French, German, and Russian.

Scott, Marian H. *Periodicals for School Libraries: A Guide to Magazines, Newspapers and Periodical Indexes.* American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Evaluates 429 magazines and newspapers for children and young people. Includes special interests and special areas.

Spache, George D. *Good Reading for the Disadvantaged Reader: Multi-Ethnic Resources* (Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1970) 201 p.

Provides lists describing books for American Indians, Eskimos, Mexican-Americans, Orientals, Puerto Ricans, and adults at various reading levels.

Spache, George D. Good Reading for Poor Readers (Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1968) 242p.

Tells how to choose a book for a child and how reading can help him solve his personal problems. Includes interests, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, workbooks, games, book clubs, and perception-related materials for elementary and high school students.

Some Questions for Thought and Discussion

Does your school make special provisions for children from a different language background?
Does it allow your language in the first three grades? Does it allow language at all? Are students punished for speaking a language other than English?

Can you see your child's teacher whenever you ask for an appointment?
Do you know his name? Do you know where his classroom is?
Can he understand you? Do you sometimes bring a friend who speaks English well with you when you visit him?
Does he seem to penalize his students for speaking a language other than English?
What do you already know about him from what your child has told you?

What do you do at your child's school?
Have you attended PTA meetings or open houses? Do you work at the school?
Do you know any parents who speak your language and have children at the same school as your child's? How often do you see them? Where?
Do you know any parents who speak English and have children at the same school as your child's? How often do you see them? Where?

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Can I help my child learn to read English as a second language?

Who are your child's friends?

Does he know students in his class? Does he know students in the neighborhood? Has he ever talked to you about anyone teasing him or fighting with him because of language?

Do you read?

Do you have books in your house? Do you have a library card? Do you recieve a newspaper? Does your child ever see you reading? Are you trying to learn English?

Does your child read?

Does he have a library card? Does he read more in your language or in English? Does he watch television more than he reads?

Why should anyone want to learn English?

Would you like your child to have a job that needs only your language, only English, or both languages? Is a job the only reason for learning English? Can someone learn English if he speaks another language at home?

Do you think that when someone learns a second language, he forgets his first language? Do you think he should? Is it possible to know two languages well? Can someone be comfortable in two cultures?